

Copyright © 2016 The John Hopkins University Press. This article first appeared in *Philosophy and Literature*, 40: 2, 347-365. Reprinted with permission by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sari Kivistö and Sami Pihlström

KANTIAN ANTI-THEODICY AND JOB'S SINCERITY

Abstract. In his essay "On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy," Immanuel Kant uses the literary figures of Job and his "friends" in his argument against theodicies. According to Kant, Job's *sincerity* (rather than his patience in suffering) is his key virtue, in contrast to his "friends." Theodicies turn out to be insincere and therefore morally flawed. This article examines the problem of evil from a perspective integrating literary reading and philosophy, arguing that the Kantian ethical criticism of theodicism based on the Book of Job is highly relevant to contemporary discussions of evil and theodicy.

I

This essay is based on a double perspective provided by literary reading and philosophy for approaching the problem of evil through a critical analysis of certain (philosophical and/or theological) texts and characters constructed and represented in them, particularly Kant's theodicy essay and its most important pre-text, the Book of Job. This methodology yields a novel approach to the familiar issue of theodicy vs. anti-theodicy. Our methodology differs from the more standard ways of examining philosophical ideas expressed in literature (for example, in works by such "philosophical" writers as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, or Siri Hustvedt). In the case discussed here, the use of literary figures and characters in a philosophical argument, rather than philosophical ideas and arguments in fictional literature, is central. Our discussion of the problem of evil and (anti-)theodicy seeks to show that certain ways of writing—especially of authoring a theodicy—could themselves be argued to exemplify moral vices and thereby to contribute to evil, instead of excusing or justifying it. That is, even intellectually

outstanding academic contributions to the problem of evil might be vulnerable to devastating ethical critique. Demonstrating this requires an integration of literary and philosophical modes of discourse, analysis, and argumentation.

Other obvious literary references dealing with theodicy and the problem of evil would include, for example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (to which we owe the phrase describing the task of all theodicies, "justify[ing] the ways of God to men," 1.26) and Voltaire's *Candide* (a famous critique of Leibniz's theodicy). Philosophical investigations of evil also often comment on literature.¹ Here we cannot discuss these various works, classical or modern, in any detail. We are neither biblical scholars nor dedicated Kant specialists. What we do argue is that a certain anti-theodictist line of argument rather naturally emerges from Kant's theodicy essay when it is read with a focus on the literary characters familiar from the Book of Job. Genre devices and different narrative patterns are important elements in constructing the argument in Job's story, and these literary features need to be studied further in order to understand Kant's views on anti-theodicy and providence.² Before turning to Kant (and the Book of Job), we must, however, briefly review the theodictist state of the art in contemporary philosophy of religion, against which our argument will develop. In particular, we will show how the Kantian criticism of Job's "friends" can be employed against contemporary theodictism. This criticism is not merely intellectual but essentially ethical: while Job's most important virtue, from the Kantian perspective, turns out to be his sincerity, the friends' theodictist vice is a certain kind of insincerity.

II

The mainstream approach to the problem of evil in contemporary Anglo-American (broadly analytic) philosophy of religion is, arguably, strongly *theodictist*. By "theodictism" we refer to all attempts to deal with the problem of evil that regard theodicy as a desideratum of theism, irrespective of whether they end up defending theism or rejecting it. Generally, theodicies seek a justification, legitimation,

and/or excusing of an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God allowing the world (His creation) to contain evil. The theodist can be an atheist, insofar as s/he concludes that God does not exist (or probably does not exist, or that there is no justification for the belief that God exists) precisely because the theodist desideratum cannot be fulfilled. In addition, those who offer a mere “defense”—instead of a theodicy proper—can be regarded as theodists in the sense that they also seek to defend God and account for God’s justice by arguing that, for all we know, God *could* have ethically acceptable reasons to allow the world to contain evil, even on the massive scale familiar to us.

Accordingly, the theodist project in contemporary philosophy of religion is not restricted to those thinkers who offer explicit theodicies, such as Richard Swinburne (defending a version of the “free will theodicy”) and John Hick (“soul-making theodicy”)—in most cases with an admirable history going back to, say, Augustine and Irenaeus, respectively—but also includes those who provide us with mere “defenses” (e.g., Alvin Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen, according to whom the “free will defense” must be distinguished from any “free will theodicy”). The theodist project encompasses even those, such as Marilyn McCord Adams, who reject all standard theodicies as morally unacceptable “instrumental” justifications of evil while still appealing to a post-mortem “beatific” metaphysical divine compensation for the injustices and sufferings of the empirical world.³

Moreover, theodicism and *evidentialism* are closely connected. As mainstream philosophy of religion today is evidentialist (in a broad sense), it is also understandably strongly theodist whenever dealing with the problem of evil. That is, evil is in most cases seen as an empirical premise challenging theism in the context of an argumentative exchange searching evidence in support of, or against, the theistic hypothesis. This is so irrespective of whether the problem of evil is regarded as a logical or as an evidential problem.⁴ Just as theodicism is a normative view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to formulate a theodicy (or at least take steps toward the direction of a theodicy by formulating a skeptical defense), evidentialism is a normative epistemological view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to be defended by means of evidence.

Theodicism is, then, a specific dimension of evidentialism: it tells us how we should discuss the problem of evil when evil is regarded as a piece of evidence against theism that the theist needs to deal with. We are not claiming that there is any logical entailment between theodicism and evidentialism; we may allow the possibility of positions that are theodicist and anti-evidentialist, or anti-theodicist and evidentialist. But in most cases the two do go well together and are natural companions. Therefore, the Kantian criticism of theodicism is relevant (though hardly decisive) against evidentialism in general.

III

Immanuel Kant's 1791 essay, "Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee" (On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy), is a largely neglected piece that usually does not get the kind of attention that Kant's famous doctrine of "radical evil" does.⁵ This section offers a basic exposition of Kant's essay. The next sections argue that the "authentic theodicy" Kant proposes is actually an anti-theodicy and that we should follow Kant in rejecting theodicies not only for intellectual but also for ethical (and, therefore, religious) reasons.⁶

As Richard Bernstein points out in his introduction to one of the most important contributions to the problem of evil in the twenty-first century, Kant's rejection of theodicies is a crucial part of his critical philosophy: insofar as theodicies aim at theoretical knowledge about God, they are not merely contingent failures but, much more strongly, impossible and *must* fail, given the limitations of human reason; on the other hand, it is by limiting the sphere of knowledge that Kant, famously, makes room for faith.⁷ Kant, therefore, is "the modern philosopher who initiates the inquiry into evil without explicit recourse to philosophical theodicy" and hence also leads the way in our attempt to rethink the meaning of evil and responsibility "after Auschwitz" (*Radical Evil*, p. 4).⁸ Kant writes about evil in a conceptual world entirely different from the one occupied by his most important predecessors, such as Leibniz.

Kant opens his essay by defining "theodicy" as "the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world" (8:255). Whoever authors a theodicy must prove "*either* that whatever in the world we judge counterpurposive is not so; *or*, if there is any such thing, that it must be judged not at all as an intended effect but as the unavoidable consequence of the nature of things; *or*, finally, that it must at least be considered not as an intended effect of the creator of all things but, rather, merely of those beings in the world to whom something can be imputed, i.e., of human beings" (8:255). "Counterpurposiveness" (*Zweckwidrigkeit*) can be divided into three categories: (i) the "absolutely counterpurposive, or what cannot be condoned or desired either as end or means," that is, the "morally counterpurposive," or "evil proper (sin)"; (ii) the "conditionally counterpurposive, or what can indeed never co-exist with the wisdom of a will as end, yet can do so as means," that is, the "physically counterpurposive," or "ill (pain)"; and (iii) a counterpurposiveness regarding "the proportion of ill to moral evil," that is, "the disproportion between crimes and penalties in the world" (8:256–57). These challenge the "world-author's" or creator's (God's) holiness, goodness, and justice, respectively—that is, the three attributes that according to Kant conjunctively constitute the "moral concept of God" (8:257). This multidimensional challenge thus puts God on moral trial.

Kant moves on to consider, in his architectonic style, the theodicies that can be proposed as counterarguments to the criticisms of the creator, focusing on the three kinds of counterpurposiveness. First, he distinguishes three ways of countering complaints regarding the *holiness* of the divine will. Among these, he first considers the claim that divine wisdom has "totally different rules" from human wisdom; "the ways of the most high are not our ways (*sunt supris sua iura*)" and are thus incomprehensible to us (8:258). He notes: "This apology, in which the vindication is worse than the complaint, needs no refutation" (8:258). The mere appeal to divine rules being different from ours turns God into a monster that does not care about morality (as we know it) at all. Second, God could be excused from the moral evil in the world (whose actuality is not denied) by maintaining that it "could not be prevented, because founded upon the limitations of the nature of human beings, as finite" (8:258–59). Here the problem is

that “the evil would thereby be justified, and, since it could not be attributed to human beings as something for which they are to be blamed, we would have to cease calling it ‘a moral evil’” (8:259). Third, it may be suggested that there is indeed moral evil in the world, but we human beings are guilty for it, and “no guilt may be ascribed to God, for God has merely tolerated it for just causes as a deed of human beings” (8:259). This leads back to the previous complaint: as God could not prevent such evil without violating other moral ends, human beings cannot be held responsible for such evil, as it is grounded in “the essence of things” and “the necessary limitations of humanity” (8:259).

The second set of attempted theodicies focuses on complaints about divine *goodness*. The first attempt says that we prefer being alive to being dead, even if life involves ills and pains; this Kant refutes as mere “sophistry” (8:259). According to the second vindication, “the preponderance of painful feelings over pleasant ones cannot be separated from the nature of an animal creature such as the human being,” but this leads to the question of “why the creator of our existence called us into life when [life] is not desirable to us” (8:260). The third theodicy in this group refers to “future happiness,” suggesting that we ought to become worthy of our future glory “through our struggle with adversities.”⁹ Again, this is only something that can be “pretended,” but there can be no “insight into it” (8:260).

Kant’s third group of failed theodicies addresses divine *justice*, the “justice of the world’s judge” (8:260). Again these come in three versions. The first says that “every crime already carries with it its due punishment” in one’s tormented conscience and hence denies that “the depraved go unpunished” (8:261). Here, Kant notes, “the virtuous man lends to the depraved the characteristic of his own constitution” (8:261); in reality, conscience does not seem to torment all wrongdoers. It could, secondly, be maintained that “it is a property of virtue that it should wrestle with adversities . . . , and sufferings only serve to enhance the value of virtue” (8:261). However, if an end of life “crown[ing] virtue” fails to materialize, the virtuous may have unjustly suffered—not in order for her/his virtue to be pure “but *because* it was pure”; moreover, the possibility that there is something after our “terrestrial life” cannot be regarded as a vindication of divine providence (8:261–62). The third and final attempt in this category

points out that we must in this world judge well-being and ill “merely as the consequence of the use of the human faculties according to the laws of nature,” instead of judging them “according to their agreement with supersensible ends” (8:262). Again, this remains “arbitrary”: we cannot appeal to a future world in which things would be different; even if we had moral reasons for religiously believing in such a world, that belief could not play a role in the argument supporting the justice of God (8:262).

Having refuted these attempts at vindication, Kant concludes, “Every previous theodicy has not performed what it promised, namely the vindication of the moral wisdom of the world-government [or God] against the doubts raised against it on the basis of what the experience of this world teaches” (8:263). However, in order to finally conclude the “trial,” it must be considered whether “our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into *the relationship in which any world as we may ever become acquainted with through experience stands with respect to the highest wisdom*”; accordingly, a piece of “negative wisdom” must be established by demonstrating that there is a “necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us” (8:263).¹⁰

After completing his negative task of refuting all previous theodicies, Kant points out, however, that a theodicy as “an *interpretation* of nature insofar as God announces his will through it” can be either “doctrinal” or “authentic” and that only doctrinal theodicies, or philosophical trials constituting “theodicy proper,” have been refuted (8:264). He has refuted what philosophers like Leibniz or (much later) Swinburne and McCord Adams have attempted in the way of theodicy. What remains is the possibility of an “*authentic* theodicy” as “the mere dismissal of all objections against divine wisdom” as a “pronouncement of the same reason through which we form our concept of God . . . as a moral and wise being,” that is, of the reason through which God himself becomes “the interpreter of his will as announced through creation” (8:264). This authentic theodicy is an interpretation of “an *efficacious* practical reason,” instead of that of “a *ratiocinating* (speculative) reason,” and it can be regarded as “the unmediated definition and voice of God” (8:264). Here, Kant turns to the Book of Job, where he claims to find an authentic interpretation allegorically expressed.

IV

The translator of Kant's theodicy essay, George di Giovanni, calls it one of the most artistically successful pieces of Kant's oeuvre. The impetus for this remark is the central passage of the text, where Kant turns to Job's poetic story as an allegory of theodicy and a representation of virtue and describes Job, as portrayed in the book, as moving and edifying in his sincerity. Kant is not alone in giving the Book of Job an important place in philosophical arguments; it was the most frequently commented and translated book of the Bible during the German and English Enlightenments.¹¹ The Book of Job has been examined in relation to a number of genres, such as lamentation, wisdom literature, and sufferer narratives. The so-called Babylonian Theodicy from the ancient Near East is often mentioned as another famous representative of a wisdom dialogue, where the discussants debate the meaning of suffering, thereby representing two rival ways of understanding the moral order of the world.¹² Job's story has also been read as a typical example of a trial narrative, where "the protagonist is subjected to a series of tests, ordeals, or temptations, so that the suffering and hardships are always viewed from the perspective of what can be *learnt* about the protagonist based on how he or she responds to adversity" and therefore "the concerns of trial narratives are epistemic rather than existential."¹³ Job's case also has similarities to courtroom narratives, since it abounds in legal imagery (defenses, accusations, judges, etc.). This generic background is notable precisely because one of the key questions here concerns the justice of God and the reasons of Job's suffering. Kant calls the whole question of theodicy a "juridical process" (*Rechtshandel* in the German original, 8:255).¹⁴

For the Church Fathers, Job's characteristic virtue was his *patience*.¹⁵ Job served as the exemplum of a man who did not lose his faith but remained steadfast (the virtue of *constantia*) in piety and preserved a certain peacefulness of mind even in the midst of extreme affliction and hardship; he patiently endured the wounds of torments, and his pains and adversities strengthened and demonstrated his virtue. Chrysostom called him the athlete of piety who successfully struggled to keep his faith, and both St. John

Chrysostom and Gregory the Great described Job's wounds as windows allowing the splendor of his inner virtue to shine forth to the world.¹⁶

However, instead of focusing on patience, Kant studied another virtue in Job's character. Job's key virtue here is his *sincerity* (*Aufrichtigkeit*), which establishes "the preeminence of the honest man over the religious flatterer in the divine verdict" (8:267): "Job speaks as he thinks, and with the courage with which he, as well as every human being in his position, can well afford; his friends, on the contrary, speak as if they were being secretly listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgment, and as if gaining his favor through their judgment were closer to their heart than the truth. Their malice in pretending to assert things into which they yet must admit they have no insight, and in simulating a conviction which they in fact do not have, contrasts with Job's frankness" (8:265–66).

For Kant, the leading feature in Job's virtuous character is not his endurance and courage in adversities but his inner sincerity, integrity, and honesty, which he does not lose although all the circumstances seem to prove that he must have sinned, because otherwise his suffering would have been mindless. Job vehemently protests against his suffering in the poetic dialogues; he does not quietly suffer his distress, as he is often depicted in traditional iconography, but complains and insists on the injustice of his adversities.¹⁷ Thus, Job's honesty of heart, rather than his alleged patience, is his greatest virtue.

Another important shift Kant makes here is that he stresses Job's virtue by contrasting it with the more negatively depicted group of friends, who offer a different perspective on suffering and in their flattering dishonesty serve as a counterimage to Job's sincerity. Kant, after all, refers to the "malice" of Job's friends. If earlier traditions were more sympathetic to Job's friends and aligned with their views, Enlightenment critics were more inclined to identify with Job, who questions the moral order implied by theodicy. In the Book of Job, the antagonism between Job and his friends is constructed by different narrative means, which direct the reader's sympathies and decisions about the righteousness of the different parties. Job stands out as an isolated hero and the uncontested protagonist of the story. This is

typical of trial narratives, which are “radically individuating and isolating” and always test the person individually (“Trials and Tragedies,” p. 132).

Job’s friends, by contrast, are given only a subordinate place in the narrative frame; this restricted position already undermines the validity of their arguments and has its parallels in other major Western narratives, such as Homer’s *Odyssey*; Odysseus is the hero who remains firm while his men fail (e.g., while listening to the Sirens’ song or when Circe turns Odysseus’s men into pigs). Job’s friends play the part of an anonymous, erring collective reasoning in the story; even Job openly scorns their platitudes.¹⁸ While they do not recognize Job as the one who does not err, they draw wrong conclusions about his condition and hence of the human experience in general. They can also be associated with other mistaken groups, such as the two disciples of Christ who, on the road to Emmaus, did not recognize their master and thus made a grave misjudgment. Job is also placed in an isolated position in order to present him as a single victim of the collective enemies, who are unanimously against him.

There are many crucial differences between Job and his companions, but the most important ones have a moral basis. Therefore, the intellectual, ethical, and religious vices of Job’s friends deserve more detailed attention. The friends’ major failure is that they try to give rational and dogmatic explanations to Job’s unwarranted suffering, and thus they represent (false) theodicy, that is, official and normative views of faith trying to justify God’s goodness and justice despite contrary experience and evidence. It has been noted that judicial or legal discourse characterizes Job’s speech in particular, as he demands reasons for his condition and accuses God of injustice, whereas the friends rely on traditional religious arguments, and their ideology is stronger than the legal discourse. They maintain that since God is good, he does not allow purposeless suffering, and therefore Job must have sinned, since suffering follows sin as its punishment. Kant argues that the discourse of the friends would probably be successful and persuasive in front of synods, official councils, and other religious institutions supporting traditional, theoretical, and rational accounts of faith, and he contrasts these official statements with Job’s drastically different and authentic personal experience. The friends represent theologians who are misled by the

tradition and its false beliefs and theological propositions. Later Girard, who gives considerable attention to the role of the friends, aligns them with priests and “the three inquisitors at Job’s bedside,” since they relentlessly try to make Job confess his guilt and consent to the community’s truth; Eliphaz in particular seems to enjoy great authority, since he always speaks first.¹⁹

For Girard, the violence of the friends manifests itself in language, in “the tremendous violence of their speeches” (Girard, p. 21), as they demand that Job explain to the community the reasons for his own suffering and the evil attributed to him. As a remedy to Job’s distress, the friends offer the traditional religious means of self-examination and repentance, but Job rejects these conventional forms of healing, since his conscience is clear and he sees no reason for self-scrutiny. The friends suggest that Job confess his guilt and sinfulness, but unlike conventional trial stories—where the protagonist “endures the experience of being tested” (“Trials and Tragedies,” p. 132) and finally returns to the right and widely accepted order of things after some temptations—Job’s story evolves in another direction. Job protests not only against his suffering but also against the interpretations of God and faith maintained by his friends—and thus against the way in which those interpretations actually *increase* his suffering by falsely attributing moral guilt to him.

The friends’ main goal is to justify God and their own theoretical constructions; they thereby deny the evidence of Job’s statements about his innocence and actual lived experience. Eager to defend their views about the goodness of God, they resort to fabrications, intellectual dishonesty, and even lies, refusing to admit that all accusations against Job are false and unjust. Job, by contrast, always speaks the truth and manifests moral rectitude; in Kant’s sense this means that he speaks *truthfully*, asserting what he believes to be true. Job has been called a Kantian hero (Mittleman, p. 40), who confesses that he knows nothing and refuses recourse to conventional metaphysical views to relieve his doubt or his painful situation.

The falsity of the friends’ views also stems from their intellectual efforts to construct tenable narratives in order to explain Job’s turmoil, and thus their mistake has a moral basis. Especially after the

Second World War, critics have emphasized that narrative means can be ethically problematic in trying to make sense of individual suffering. Relying on this interpretative approach, Carol A. Newsom has analyzed how the friends (falsely) attempt to reduce and integrate Job's experience (and also God's reasons) to larger narrative structures that would explain the causes and consequences of Job's suffering.²⁰ Newsom points out that in trying to integrate Job's experience of meaningless suffering by their traditional narrative patterns, the friends perform an unethical act, since these patterns (e.g., stories of the bad fate of the wicked or the hope of the virtuous) fail to do justice to Job's authentic experience—his testimony—and deny his own considerations of his condition. Job sees no narrative whole or conclusion that would relieve or explain his condition, but merely purposeless repetition, relentless pain and suffering for no reason. The friends suggest that by praying, Job would attain an order in his affliction, but a meaningful moral order is precisely what Job is fundamentally lacking in his suffering. He insists that his suffering cannot be reduced to any storylines with initiative causes and their effects, or relieved by therapeutic prayers or by the friends' consolations (see Job 16:2–5). Nor can it, as Newsom observes, be explained with reference to such conventional narrative images as that of transformation, survival or hope (see Job 11:18, 17:13), which would integrate Job's suffering into a graspable story. As Newsom claims ("Friends," p. 242), Job questions the *narratability* of his violent experience.²¹

The falsity of the friends' views is also based on the inscrutability of God's reasons; they wrongly believe that divine judgment can be understood with the same logic as human action, as if God followed the same human moral order.²² Teleology exists only in human explanations, which build narratives and identify causes and their effects. But God's knowledge is not like human knowledge, and it would be blasphemy even to claim so. Kant emphasizes that the problem of evil and suffering cannot be explained rationally or by appealing to such simple narrative and doctrinal patterns as punishment and reward, and we human beings should recognize and acknowledge the limits of reason. Otherwise our fabrications are in danger of turning into lies. It would be childish to think that external worldly goods are rewards from God, and it would be equally naïve and idle to state that human beings' misfortunes are punishments for their sins. As Alan Mittleman argues (Mittleman, p. 35), with reference to Moses Maimonides's views,

such statements and ideas are entirely derived from the human world, although they pretend metaphysical knowledge of divine intentions and goals that cannot be known. We need teleological ideas and narrations in order to make sense of the world, but these constructions should not be presupposed as true. In this view, Job's friends represent theodicy falsely maintaining that divine causes can be illuminated by speculative human reason. Another mistake the supporters of theodicy make is that, in their view, the world is purposeful, ordered, and teleological, although Job's lived experience denies any sensible causality. Instead of building explanations and appealing to fictive causation, they should aim to relieve misery by helping the victims. The courtroom narrative comes to the conclusion that there is no justice—in the human sense—in the world, since the plague strikes the good and the bad without distinction.

While Kant engages in no detailed analysis of the narrative structures of the Book of Job, his philosophical sympathies clearly lie on Job's side, instead of on the side of Job's friends. For Kant, Job's story is in fact not as much about his relationship to God as it is about his relationship to other human beings. Girard maintains that Job is not ethically mistreated only by his friends or by God; he also becomes the scapegoat of the whole community. Girard claims that God is not responsible for the suffering Job experiences, but Job is essentially the victim of the people, as his truth remains unheard²³ and he becomes the object of the community's collective, social violence. Thus Job's story acquires new meanings as the story about the order, which names the blameless crowd and the guilty victim.²⁴

God's speech to Job in Chapter 38 famously lays out the "inscrutability" of the divinely created world system, also showing Job, according to Kant, its "horrible side" with destructiveness and counterpurposiveness (8:266). What remains through Job's encounter with God is Job's honesty and "his faith on morality" (rather than any "morality on faith"): only the former kind of faith, based on honesty, can be a foundation of "a religion of good life conduct" (8:267). This faith, in a way (admittedly slightly anachronistically), turns Job into a Kantian moral thinker, while representing his friends as exemplifications of the moral vices of rationalizing theodicies. In contrast, for the purposes of an authentic theodicy, "sincerity in taking notice of the impotence of our reason" and "honesty in not

distorting our thoughts in what we say” are key virtues (8:267). Sincerity, in short, is “the principal requirement in matters of faith” (8:267). While we cannot know for certain whether what we say is true, because we could always be mistaken, we can and must “stand by the *truthfulness*” of what we say (8:267). Hence, the moral vices of theodicism are in the end related to one of the worst vices of Kantian ethics, namely, lying (see 8:268–69).²⁵

Kant regards insincerity—our tendency “to distort even inner declarations before [our] own conscience”—as “*in itself evil* even if it harms no one” (8:270). Thus, he seems to argue that speculative theodicies—manifested by Job’s friends—are themselves exemplifications of evil. They are evil in a specific sense: they do not acknowledge the Kantian (Enlightenment) ideal of free and responsible thinking. They are therefore revolts, not primarily against God but against humanity itself, conceived in a Kantian way. The insincerity of theodicism does not recognize the essential human capacity for freedom and responsibility, the kind of autonomous thinking that is presupposed by morality.

Theodicies, then, are *failures to think*. In this sense they interestingly resemble what Hannah Arendt called the banality of evil. According to Arendt’s analysis of Adolf Eichmann, the striking feature of his “banally” evil actions was an “inability to think.” This characterization does not, of course, mean that all manifestations of evil would be manifestations of banality, but it could entail that the specific evil of theodicies is at least related to the Arendtian banality of evil.²⁶ Arguably, Kant’s (and Arendt’s) criticism of the failure to think as a vice of theodicism adds a powerful argument to the resources of “moral anti-theodicism.”

V

However, is the Kantian criticism of rationalizing theodicies sufficient? This is a question we may still ask even after having found it a powerful case against traditional theodicies. Kant’s treatment of Job is directly relevant to the more recent theodicy vs. anti-theodicy discussions.

According to Kant, an “authentic theodicy”—in contrast to rationalizing theodicies—can be found in the Book of Job. However, it could be argued, even by Kant’s own lights, that to offer a *truly* authentic theodicy is to offer *no theodicy at all*, or perhaps even more strongly to offer an anti-theodicy, because theodicies (of any kind) are necessarily inauthentic due to being necessarily immoral. Job’s friends can, moreover, be seen as analogous to the theodicist writers within the contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, set against the more honest attempts to deal with the problem of evil we find in post-Holocaust philosophers of religion and political theorists like Arendt (see *Eichmann in Jerusalem*), Richard Bernstein (see *Radical Evil*), and Hans Jonas,²⁷ or in novelists and other writers dealing with the impossibility of ever adequately representing the Holocaust or testifying for its victims, such as Primo Levi and Imre Kertesz.²⁸

Like Bernstein, Susan Neiman also emphasizes the moral unacceptability or even obscenity of theodicies, and finds Kant the key figure. The issue comes back to the human limitations that prevent us from having any theoretical knowledge about God, or even about morality (which can only be known, albeit a priori, from the point of view of practical reason). Knowing the connections between moral and natural evils would, according to Neiman’s reading of Kant, “undermine the possibility of morality,” and therefore solving the problem of evil is not only an impossible but an *immoral* project.²⁹ Job’s pseudocomforters actually sin against their righteous friend and against truth itself; theodicy, in addition to being impossible and immoral, “tends toward blasphemy” (Neiman, p. 69). But Neiman’s account of Kant goes beyond the mere appeal to the limits of human knowledge and reason: “So Kant denounced the standard position one might call the theodicy of ignorance. . . . What’s wrong with saying that God has ways we cannot understand? For Kant, even this much knowledge is too much knowledge. To say that God has purposes, though we don’t know them, is to say that God has purposes. That’s precisely what was in doubt. To assert it a priori is to trade recognition of the reality of suffering for a consolation so abstract it cannot really comfort” (Neiman, p. 69).³⁰

Accordingly, the kind of inscrutability of evil that Bernstein and others legitimately insist on must not be confused with the appeal to God's hidden purposes. To admit, in an anti-theodicistic manner, that evil remains mysterious and inscrutable to us is not to claim, superstitiously, that there *are* (or that there might be) hidden purposes we cannot know. Both are appeals to human finitude, but only the former is morally sincere, avoiding the latter's metaphysical postulation of or speculation with hidden purposes. As we have seen, the figure modeling nonspeculative sincerity here is Job, whereas his friends embody the vices of superstition, insincerity, and blasphemy.

Moreover, the fact that those vices are in the end blasphemous is fully compatible with theodicies' being violations of the Enlightenment principles of free and responsible thought. This is one indication of the way in which anti-theodicism leads us to question the allegedly sharp dichotomy between religious/theological and secular approaches to fundamental human problems such as evil and suffering. Such distinctions may be less important than the morally fundamental division between theodicism and anti-theodicism. Indeed, given that the moral law is, for Kant, the ground of religion, not the other way around, the worst thing about theodicies is not that they are blasphemous but that they are immoral. In Kantian terms, it is against our moral obligation of treating all human beings, including ourselves, always also as ends in themselves (instead of ever treating them as mere means)³¹ to offer instrumentalizing theodicies according to which evil and suffering serve some purpose. We do not need any elaborate theological construction that shows theodicies to be blasphemous in some technical sense; what we need is some (more) moral philosophy.

We can say, then, that theodicies are, from a Kantian perspective, morally wrong because they tend to forget our fundamental human finitude. This is also why they are blasphemous, but that theological vice is derived from their moral vice. We may also say that Kant's radical anti-theodicism is rooted (recall the etymology of "radical" in the Latin *radix*, root) in his general theory of humanity, particularly human limits and finitude. We may, furthermore, connect all this with Kant's views on radical evil (which we have generally set aside here), perceiving that for Kant radical evil amounts to the

tendency—rooted in us—to prioritize maxims that set our own welfare before the requirements of moral law. Because our engagement in theodistic speculations does precisely this by treating suffering human beings as instruments for some greater good and by setting, in a sense, the theological peace of mind of the rationalizing theodistic prior to this moral duty to attend to the other's suffering, the construction of theodicies is itself, by Kantian lights, evil, or even radically evil. Therefore, in short, theodicy, qua immoral, may itself be radically evil.³²

Astonishingly, some philosophers and theologians still maintain that a purely theoretical (theodistic) perspective is adequate for dealing with the problem of evil. Kant, who more generally is a paradigmatic case of a rigorously intellectual approach to morality, knew better and found it necessary to explore an ancient literary text in order to address this problem. The Kantian anti-theodistic can easily agree with C. Fred Alford who, in his illuminating comparison of the Book of Job with Primo Levi's Holocaust writings, suggests, "The innocent and good suffer for no discernable reason, a problem made even more acute when one imagines that it is God who causes us to suffer. When we are confronted with this terrible thought (traditionally called 'the problem of theodicy'), only the poetic form can save us. For the poetic narrative acts to hold and support us . . . as we learn the terrible truth. Poetic form allows narrative content to be heard and accepted, content that would otherwise be too terrifying to contemplate" (Alford, p. 55).

What does our analysis show, then, about the ways in which literary theorists focusing on structures of poetic narrative and philosophers focusing on conceptual and argumentative structures can join forces in attempts to understand evil and suffering? While this essay has, we hope, taken some steps toward articulating a coherent anti-theodistic approach to these issues, it can also be seen as a case study whose relevance extends beyond this specific topic. A philosophico-literary study of texts, characters, and narrative structures may analogously illuminate other humanly significant themes such as knowledge, existence, or meaning.

1. For example, both the historical reality of the Holocaust and literary representations of the Holocaust by writers like Primo Levi have been discussed at length in philosophical contributions to Holocaust studies, including Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002); and Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, rev. ed. (1991; repr., London: Routledge, 2004).
2. The Book of Job has been an important subtext to many contemporary novelists. Most famously, Kafka's Josef K. in *The Trial* has been interpreted as a modern Job (see Stuart Lasine, "The Trials of Job and Kafka's Josef K.," *The German Quarterly* 63, no. 2 [1990]: 187–98). See also Wiebrecht Ries, *Transzendenz als Terror: Eine religionsphilosophische Studie über Franz Kafka* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1977), pp. 123–36, on the "Hiob-Situation" in religious thought, i.e., God's silence and absence, as a key theme in Kafka. Other later rewritings of the Book of Job include, among others, Milton's *Samson* and *Paradise Regained*. On the pervasive importance of Job to Milton, see, e.g., Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1966); Voltaire's *Candide* (see, e.g., Nancy Senior, "Voltaire and the Book of Job," *The French Review* 47, no. 2 [1973]: 340–47); Melville's *Moby Dick* (Janis Stout, "Melville's Use of the Book of Job," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25, no. 1 [1970]: 69–83), and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Vanessa Rampton, "Dostoevskii and the Book of Job: The Struggle to Find Faith," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39, no. 2 [2010]: 203–17).
3. For this broadly theodistic literature on the problem of evil, see, e.g., Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 25 (1989): 297–310, and "Ignorance, Instrumentality,

- Compensation, and the Problem of Evil," *Sophia* 52 (2013): 7–26. For some critical discussion of this theodacist orientation from a pragmatist and anti-theodacist perspective, see Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), chap. 5, and *Taking Evil Seriously* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2014).
4. On logical vs. evidential formulations of the problem of evil, see *God and the Problem of Evil*, ed. William Rowe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
 5. The essay was first published in *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, September 1791, pp. 194–225, and it is available, e.g., in *Immanuel Kant: Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), vol. 9. For an English translation, see Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 20–37 (with the translator's introduction, pp. 21–23). In referencing, though we are citing the English translation, the standard *Akademie-Ausgabe* numbering will be used. For Kant's theory of radical evil, see book 1 of his *Religionsschrift* (*Religion innerhalb der blossen Vernunft* [1794], in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 9). We cannot examine the theory of radical evil in this paper. For secondary literature focusing on the theodicy essay, see, e.g., Johannes Brachtendorff, "Kants Theodizee-Aufsatz—Die Bedingungen des Gelingens philosophischen Theodizee," *Kant-Studien* 93 (2002): 57–83; and Elizabeth C. Galbraith, "Kant and 'A Theodicy of Protest'," in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 179–89.
 6. While we are primarily interested in what may be called a "moral anti-theodicy" (see Robert Mark Simpson, "Moral Antitheodicy: Prospects and Problems," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65 [2009]: 153–69), we are not assuming a sharp dichotomy between "intellectual" and "ethical" considerations of the problem of evil.
 7. Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 3–4.

8. For Bernstein's reading of Kant's theory of radical evil, see Bernstein, *Radical Evil*, chap. 1. On Kant, Job, and radical evil, see also Martin Beck Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Postsecular Meditations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
9. This theodicy in fact comes close to what is in contemporary discussion proposed by Marilyn McCord Adams as a "beatific compensation" view. See Adams, "Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil."
10. Here Kant distinguishes between "artistic" and "moral" wisdom, concluding that "we have no concept," and can never hope to attain a concept, of "the *unity in the agreement* in a sensible world between . . . artistic and moral wisdom" (8:263). No mortal being can, he argues, prove "the world-author's moral wisdom," as we lack insight into the ground of the sensible world in a supersensible (intelligible) one (8:264).
11. Jonathan Sheehan, "The Poetics and Politics of Theodicy," *Prooftexts* 27 (2007): 211–32 (213).
12. On the generic backgrounds of the Book of Job, see, e.g., Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Carol A. Newsom, "Job and His Friends: A Conflict of Moral Imaginations," *Interpretation* 53, no. 3 (1999): 239–53 (239), hereafter abbreviated "Friends"; Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991).
13. Vivasvan Soni, "Trials and Tragedies: The Literature of Unhappiness (A Model for Reading Narratives of Suffering)," *Comparative Literature* 59, no. 2 (2007), 119–39 (121), hereafter abbreviated "Trials and Tragedies"; Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010). In the latter (p. 335), Soni states that the trial narrative acquires its strongest theoretical development in Kant's writings. On Job and suffering, see also Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Philippe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998); Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the*

- Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010; see esp. chap. 9); N. Verbin, *Divinely Abused: A Philosophical Perspective on Job and His Kin* (London: Continuum, 2010).
14. On legal discourse in the Book of Job, see Newsom, *Book of Job*, p. 150ff., and in Kant, see Soni, *Mourning Happiness*, p. 342n15. On the Book of Job as a parody of legal discourse, see Dell, *The Book of Job*, chap. 3; on parodical courtroom narratives, see Sari Kivistö, *Medical Analogy in Latin Satire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), chap. 3.
 15. On Job's proverbial patience, see, e.g., Tertullian, *De patientia*, Cap. XIV; Augustine, *De patientia*, Cap. XI ("Patientia sancti Job"); Luigi Novarini, ed., *Adagia ex sanctorum Patrum ecclesiasticorumque scriptorum monumentis prompta* (Lyon, 1637, Adag. DCXXXIII).
 16. Gregory the Great presented his complete system of the seven deadly sins in his detailed commentary on the Book of Job (*Moralia in Iob*). The idea of wounds as windows for inner virtue to shine through has an obvious Christian connotation.
 17. Ancient and traditional interpretations praised Job's patience, but modern Jewish interpretations have praised Job the rebel as a heroic figure and viewed his misfortunes as unfair. See Alan Mittleman, "The Job of Judaism and the Job of Kant," *HTR* 102, no. 1 (2009): 25–50 (29) (with reference to Neiman), hereafter abbreviated Mittleman; Bernard Ehrlich, "The Book of Job as a Book of Morality," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 30–38; Dell, *The Book of Job*, pp. 5–56. See also John T. Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), for a reading of Job according to which Job's protest goes as far as blasphemy (a nonstandard view among commentators). C. Fred Alford doesn't quite agree with this, but does maintain that when Job's patience "is at an end," his "rage borders on heresy" (C. Fred Alford, *After the Holocaust: The Book of Job, Primo Levi, and the Path to Affliction* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 16); hereafter abbreviated Alford.
 18. See Dell, *The Book of Job*, pp. 96, 176 (with reference to Job 12:2, 13:12, 16:2–5, 26:2–4).
 19. René Girard, *Job, the Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 77, 115; hereafter abbreviated Girard.

20. Newsom, *Book of Job*, pp. 101ff. (on the friends' attempts to render Job's experience meaningful by narration), and pp. 132ff. (on Job's resistance to narrative); Newsom, "Job and His Friends," esp. pp. 240–41.
21. Similar references to the limits of narrative and of testimony have been frequent in studies of Holocaust literature, e.g., Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Newsom's interpretation is clearly influenced by post-Holocaust perspectives on suffering and narration.
22. Note, however, that the *mere* appeal to the fundamental difference between divine and human moral standards is one of the theodicies rejected by Kant.
23. The theme of the "unheard" cries of the sufferer is frequently invoked in literature dealing with the Holocaust. See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*. This is related to the problem of testimony, because it is in a sense impossible, while being morally necessary, to testify for the suffering of those whose cries can no longer reach the witness. See also Dan Mathewson, "Between Testimony and Interpretation: The Book of Job in Post-Holocaust, Jewish Theological Reflection," *Studies in Literary Imagination* 41, no. 2 (2008): 17–39. He notes that contemporary anti-theodic accounts of the Holocaust are prefigured in Job. See also Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chap. 2.
24. On Girard's views, see his *Job*, and *Sacrifice, Scripture & Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Ann W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).
25. Lying is without exception morally wrong, according to Kant, as argued in *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. On Kant and lying, see also *The Philosophy of Deception*, ed. Clancy Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
26. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963; repr., London: Penguin, 1994).

27. See Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, ed. Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996).
28. See Alford, *After the Holocaust*, for a reading of Levi in the context of the Book of Job. Alford notes that when asked to identify the books that have most influenced him, Levi placed the Book of Job “as first among all books—not all books in the Bible but rather *all* books” (p. 88).
29. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Philosophy: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 69; hereafter abbreviated Neiman.
30. See pp. 57–84 for Neiman’s overall analysis of Kant’s contribution to the discourse on evil. Similarly, according to Alford (*After the Holocaust*, p. 101), Job’s “answer” is that “there is no answer. To even ask the classical question of theodicy, ‘Why do the innocent suffer if God is all good and all powerful?’ is to misunderstand one’s place in the universe.” Alford also states that Job’s experience is “destroyed by the experience of Auschwitz” (p. 112).
31. For this formulation of the categorical imperative, see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*), in *Immanuel Kant: Werke in zehn Bänden*, section 2 (4:428-429).
32. Emmanuel Levinas, whose “Useless Suffering” (in *Entre-Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav [1991; repr., London: Continuum, 2006], pp. 78–87) is a devastating attack on any theodicy after the Holocaust, also approvingly refers (in a footnote) to Kant’s anti-theodicy reading of the Book of Job and observes, with Kant, that Job “refuses theodicy right to the end” (see p. 210, n9). For a discussion of Levinas’s rejection of theodicies (not examined in this essay despite its obvious relevance), see Bernstein, *Radical Evil*.